

American

NEWS & VIEWS

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U.S., Germany Sign First Science and Technology Agreement

Agreement provides framework for cooperation between scientists

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF STATE
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MEDIA NOTE

United States and Germany Sign First Science and Technology Agreement

The Governments of the United States and Germany held a Science and Technology Agreement signing ceremony today at the U.S. Department of State in Washington D.C. Deputy Secretary of State James Steinberg signed the agreement on behalf of the United States, and German Minister of Education and Research Dr. Annette Schavan and German Ambassador Klaus Scharioth signed the bilateral agreement on behalf of Germany. Assistant Secretary Dr. Kerri-Ann Jones of the Bureau of Oceans, and International Environmental and Scientific Affairs also participated in the ceremony.

This bilateral umbrella science and technology agreement will facilitate the initiation and implementation of future activities between German and American scientists by providing an overall framework for cooperation. The agreement will also serve as a mechanism to address any obstacles to cooperation, as well as bring various agencies and research institutes together to address cross-cutting scientific issues while providing mutual scientific, social, and economic benefits.

In addition to the bilateral agreement, the U.S. and Germany signed two Memoranda of Understanding in the fields of energy and cancer research. Under the two arrangements, the U.S. and Germany will further cooperation to address global challenges in energy, food security, climate change, ocean and water sciences, and health, including the fields of stem cell research and rare diseases.

Emergency Response in Haiti Transitions to Relief

Press briefing with Ambassador Lucke and General Keen in Haiti

Washington — In a February 17 press briefing in Haiti, Lewis Lucke, U.S. special coordinator for relief and reconstruction, and Lieutenant General Ken Keen, commander of the Haiti Joint Task Force, told reporters that the U.S. commitment to Haiti remains strong and that the emergency response to Haiti's devastating earthquake is now transitioning to relief efforts.

Ambassador Lucke described the United States' immediate post-earthquake response as an effort to provide essential services — food, water, medical services — to Haitian survivors, working closely with the United Nations and other international partners. "We've been able to meet some of these immediate needs with our international partners," Lucke said.

The transition now to other issues — sanitation, shelter, rubble removal and especially jobs — is critical for the next stages of relief in Haiti, according to Lucke. Support for these relief efforts comes from the United Nations, the international community and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), as well as from the Haitian government.

"We've also seen an evolution of the kind of organization and cooperation with a number of organizations in this effort. The United Nations effort has become more robust, with many, many new NGOs ... clustered around various sectors, such as water, sanitation, resettlement and so forth. And that's becoming better organized and moving in the right direction, really, every day," Lucke said.

"There have been more and more international partners that have joined the mix. We are seeing more and more partners, like NGOs, other friendly countries to Haiti. We're also seeing some significant progress, I think, in leadership in key sectors by ... the Haitian government, taking a real lead in such areas as shelter, sanitation, reconstruction, planning and jobs. ... It's been very satisfying for us to work with our Haitian friends and colleagues," Lucke added.

When the earthquake struck on January 12, the United States' first priority in moving U.S. military forces to Haiti was to provide immediate emergency response to save lives by opening the airport within 24 hours, providing medical care and distributing food and water. But this emergency response is now transitioning to longer-term efforts supported by a broad partnership.

"Our focus has been ... initially providing medical assistance and distributing water and food," Keen said. "Over time, as we met those initial needs, we have seen that need transition as we work with the [U.S. Agency for International Development], the United Nations and nongovernment organizations, whether that be in supporting security requirements as we push out the humanitarian assistance through supporting distribution points throughout the city of Port-au-Prince as well as in other cities, such as Leogane and to the west of Port-au-Prince, or whether it be in assisting in distribution of shelter and other needed items."

Keen saw the need for military assistance diminishing as civilian agencies are able to do more: "As we see this

transition occurring, we see our civilian partners increase their capabilities — both government here in Haiti as well as the nongovernment organizations — we see the need for our military assistance dwindling.”

“However at the present time, there’s still a great need across the board,” he added, “and we still remain decisively engaged, providing critical assistance to the government of Haiti and all the organizations that I just mentioned.”

Full Participation Expected in Iraqi Election

By Stephen Kaufman
Staff Writer

Washington — Ahead of Iraq’s March 5 elections, the U.S. ambassador to Baghdad expects broad Iraqi participation in the vote, which he said can help contribute to political reconciliation in the country. He also said the United States must work with Iraqis to build political and democratic institutions, modernize the country’s economy, and help it establish productive relations with its neighbors.

Speaking to reporters at the State Department February 17, Ambassador Christopher Hill said he is encouraged by the level of Iraqi participation he has witnessed thus far in the electoral process.

“The campaign has really started in earnest. There are campaign placards all over every surface in the country, it seems, right now. There are some 6,198 candidates. There are 18.9 million registered voters. There are 300,000 poll station workers. There are 50,000 polling stations spread over 9,000 polling centers,” he said.

Ten countries, including the United States, which has provided \$200 million to assist with the elections, will be providing election monitoring teams. The 26 U.S. teams will be spread over 18 Iraqi provinces, with extra personnel in the key areas of Anbar, Basra, Dyalah, Kirkuk and Ninawa, Hill said.

“I think the trend is toward ... full participation in the elections, and that’s what we’re all gearing up for,” the ambassador said.

The election “in many respects will determine the future of Iraq ... and also the future of the U.S. relationship with Iraq,” he said. If the elections are done well, they “can be a source of political reconciliation,” he said.

Hill also underscored the need to show the continued U.S. commitment to Iraq in the aftermath of the election.

“As a new Iraqi government forms and lays out what kind of relationship it wants with the United States, they

will need to see that the United States is committed to building a relationship that will work out to our mutual benefit in the long term,” he said.

U.S. troops will be working with Iraqi forces in an effort to forestall election-related terrorist attacks, but Hill said “everything is on schedule” for the end of U.S. combat missions by the end of August. He said approximately 50,000 U.S. troops will remain and be part of “advise-and-assist brigades” in support of Iraqi forces.

In February 17 remarks at the U.S. Institute of Peace, Hill said the Obama administration has identified three main areas of focus going forward in the U.S.-Iraqi bilateral relationship.

“We must help Iraq build healthy political and democratic institutions in an environment of peace and security,” he said. In addition, “we must help Iraq modernize its economy ... [and] we must help Iraq establish a productive relationship with its neighbors.”

The 2010 election stands in contrast to the violent power struggles of 2006 and 2007, where “interests and power were played out on the streets against a backdrop of death, of uncertainty and fear,” he said.

Today, “power and interests are battling it out with election posters that frankly obscure the bridges and blanket the markets in every province,” Hill said. “It’s inspiring stuff.”

But he said the true test will not be in how the election winners behave, but how the election losers accept the results.

“I would argue in Iraq as elsewhere, losers have an even bigger responsibility to be part of the political process. And I’ve always felt that the quality of democracy is determined by the losers, and Iraq will be no exception to that,” Hill said.

Afghan Civilian Interests Central to Operation Moshtarak

By Stephen Kaufman
Staff Writer

Washington — The Afghan-led operations against insurgents in central Helmand province, with support from the International Security Force for Afghanistan (ISAF), are being conducted with the goal of not only ending Taliban control of the area, but also providing services to the civilian population and reassuring people that the Afghan government presence is there to stay.

British Army Major General Patrick Carter, who is the commander of ISAF Regional Command South, spoke to

reporters from Afghanistan via teleconference February 18 and said the residents of Marja and Nad Ali, the population centers at the focus of the operation, have wanted Taliban forces to leave, but need reassurance that Afghan government authority will remain in place after it is restored.

"What has been most encouraging to us has been how they wanted this operation to happen. They've been living under a very oppressive regime, particularly in Marja, but also in northern Nad Ali as well," Carter said. But while the Afghan residents are welcoming the arrival of Afghan security forces, they are looking for "confidence that the security forces will stay and hold."

Ahead of the operation, which began February 12, Golab Mangal, the governor of Helmand province, identified what the population wanted and what the Afghan government needed to do to assert its authority. He worked with other Afghan officials to alert the population to the coming military activities and assure them that better governance would be provided.

Operation Moshtarak, which means "together" in both Dari and Pashto, is a cooperative effort between international and Afghan forces, with Afghan forces in the lead. Carter said the extent to which Afghan army and police forces have been fully involved in the decisionmaking process of the operation has been "impressive."

Their active involvement, from the planning stage through the execution of the operation, "means that we're getting an exponential leap, in terms of our collective capability," he said.

Carter said a key part of the new counterinsurgency strategy developed by the ISAF commander, General Stanley McCrystal, is to ensure that "we take the people with us, rather than simply defeating an insurgency."

Afghan and ISAF forces have been using shuras, or traditional gatherings with community councils, to ascertain the needs of the population and provide a venue for full communication to outline concerns and help plan for greater stability and prosperity.

"First and foremost what Afghans want is security because at the moment that is something that has been lacking for 30 years or so," Carter said. "They want the confidence to be able to send their children to school. They want the confidence to be able to go shopping. They want the confidence simply to be able to move their sick relative to a hospital, or whatever else it might be."

Carter emphasized the importance of establishing the freedom of movement between Marja and Nad Ali, where

he said citizens have been "regularly fleeced at illegal checkpoints" as they attempt to transport their goods and services.

"If you can get Afghans to be able to move freely on those roads, you'll begin to get the economy to move and governance to be delivered more broadly across the region," he said.

For longer term goals, the residents want better education opportunities for children and basic health care and other services, which civilian workers from the United States and other countries are providing as areas are secured. "They'd like to see female doctors working. They would like to see genuine agriculture. And they'd like to see an economy that gives them job prospects," Carter said.

"It's those basic-level services that they are most looking for," he said, adding that U.S. civilian efforts, alongside ISAF and their Afghan partners, seek to deliver those very services.

Operation Moshtarak will "take time," the general said, due to the continued threats from land mines and improvised explosive devices, and also out of a desire to prevent civilian casualties wherever possible.

Afghan and ISAF forces "are being extremely careful" in how they are conducting the clearance phase of the operation. "They are minimizing collateral damage and they are using small arms wherever they possibly can," he said.

Ultimately, the goal of the operation is to persuade the civilian population that "they're better off with their government than they are with the forces of the insurgents," he said, and the operation will also permit more Taliban fighters who wish to lay down their arms to reintegrate into Afghan society.

"We just want to see that the end effect is a stable effect with people oriented in the right direction," Carter said.

International Navies Coordinate to Deter Somali Pirates

Prosecutions of pirates proceed in Africa and the United States
By Jacquelyn S. Porth
Staff Writer

Washington — An international naval flotilla of vessels from the European Union, NATO, Russia, China, the United States and other nations is patrolling the Gulf of Aden to deter Somali pirates.

On an average day, 17 ships offer security in a sea corridor where an estimated 30,000 commercial cargo vessels sail each year.

The navy ships assigned to the mission collaborate without a formal military structure or supervising naval commander.

State Department official Thomas Countryman said the model that has evolved works well and could be readily adapted elsewhere.

Countryman, who is the principal deputy assistant secretary of state for political-military affairs, led the U.S. delegation to the fifth plenary meeting of the Contact Group on Piracy off the Coast of Somalia in New York in January. Formed a year ago, the group meets quarterly at the United Nations.

Nearly 50 nations and seven international organizations, including the African Union, NATO, the European Union, the League of Arab States, the International Maritime Organization and the United Nations Secretariat, are working within the Contact Group to address piracy through maritime and justice system actions.

Countryman said all the participants are bound together by the conviction that joint action — such as sharing best practices and coordinating military, legal and industry tactics — is the best way to fight piracy in the region.

REGAINING CONTROL

Piracy plagues the waters off of Somalia and the Gulf of Aden, and the associated disruption of trade and distribution of humanitarian aid is a challenge for the international community.

Seven ships now are being held by pirates, along with 160 crew members. Pirates recently released a fishing vessel from Taiwan that they had held since April 2009. Three crew members from Indonesia and China died during the ordeal.

Crews from Bulgaria, China, Germany, Indonesia, Italy, the Philippines, Russia, Taiwan, Tuvalu, Ukraine and other nations have been held by pirates at various times.

In the Gulf of Aden, where the international naval vessels are on pirate duty, Countryman said the rate of successful attacks has fallen to nearly zero since the summer of 2009. He attributed the declining success rate of pirate attacks to “ever more effective coordination” among the navies on patrol.

In 2009, he said, international naval personnel came in contact with more than 700 pirates. Often, naval teams boarding pirate ships will confiscate weapons or any other equipment that could be used to pirate a cargo ship, cruise ship or private yacht.

Recent statistics show that 50 pirate attacks against 198 ships succeeded in 2009. In 2008, there were 42 successful attacks on 122 ships. Countryman told reporters at a State Department briefing in Washington February 18 that simple means of deterring pirates — such as using water hoses — have proven to be the most important factor in declining rates of success by pirates in the region.

The anti-piracy effort would benefit from additional ships assigned to the task as well as air assets, which Countryman said would “provide additional warning of potential pirate attacks to ships in the region.”

The U.S. Navy recently assigned three P-3 Orion maritime surveillance aircraft to the Seychelles islands to perform counterpiracy duty.

The United States has been actively pursuing efforts to bring pirates to justice for their criminal activities. It captured 25 pirates and sent 24 for prosecution in Kenya. Another pirate is being prosecuted in the U.S. District Court in the Southern District of New York. Some pirates have been prosecuted and convicted, while others have been prosecuted and freed.

Meanwhile, there are four working groups operating under the Contact Group. The United Kingdom chairs one on military coordination and information sharing. Egypt leads the group on public information. The United States heads a working group to strengthen shipping self-protection. (Countryman said the United States and other nations are trying to draw up clearer guidelines “for what the captain of an individual vessel ought to do” to thwart an onslaught by pirates.) Denmark chairs the fourth working group on judicial issues.

During the most recent Contact Group meeting in New York, INTERPOL announced that it would form its own working group to assist its member nations in deterring pirates.

Greece will chair the next Contact Group meeting in May. Future meetings will be chaired by South Korea and Turkey.

Arab-American Journalists Launch Simultaneous Radio Broadcast

Live show aims to broaden public awareness of Arab and Muslim issues

By M. Scott Bortot
Staff Writer

Washington — It is not unusual for two Arab Americans to spend an hour talking freely about current political issues, but veteran journalists Ray Hanania and Laila Alhusinni have taken it to a whole new level.

On February 12, Hanania and Alhusinni launched the radio talk show Radio Baladi simultaneously from two American cities. Jointly hosted between the two journalists, Radio Baladi aspires to spark discussion about Middle East issues among Arab and Muslim Americans as well as the broader American public. Local and national decisionmakers are also a target audience.

Judging from the initial response, their show is a success.

"I wasn't expecting people to call us from outside our listening area, but we even had a call from Orlando, Florida," Alhusinni told America.gov about Radio Baladi's first broadcast. Along with its radio broadcast, Radio Baladi is streamed live and podcast.

Radio Baladi is a merging of Alhusinni's *Good Morning Michigan* radio program with Hanania's *Mornings with Ray Hanania* and reaches the country's largest Arab-American populations, located in northern Illinois and Michigan. Broadcast in English for an hour on Friday mornings — 7–8 a.m. in Chicago and 8–9 a.m. in Dearborn, Michigan, one time zone away — the talk show tackles issues of interest to Arab and Muslim Americans.

"We are trying to demonstrate, by linking our stations, that we shouldn't be ignored," Hanania said. "We want them to know that we are doing our best to serve as a communications network with our community."

An award-winning journalist of Palestinian origin, Hanania has more than 30 years' reporting experience and writes for the *Jerusalem Post* and a Palestinian online news site, PalestineNote.com. Hanania also has 12 years' experience with radio in the Chicago area. Alhusinni, of Syrian origin, has a background in television and radio and hosts her *Good Morning Michigan* show in both English and in Arabic.

Radio Baladi seeks to distinguish itself from some advocacy-driven Arab-American media by focusing on caller views and opinions.

"We want to engage people, we want to get them talking," Hanania said. "We want to get the people in the community to do the talking."

Alhusinni is in total agreement. Contrasting her negative experience with freedom of expression in some Arab countries to her experience in the United States, she looks forward to fielding tough questions on air.

"We were not comfortable with every question we received," Alhusinni said of the first broadcast. "But we want to hear all opinions because that is how you open dialogue with American society."

The first segment of Radio Baladi's opening broadcast featured a discussion with prominent Muslim-American attorney Lena Masri on the hijab and women's rights. For the second half-hour, listeners followed a discussion with Khaled Almaeena, editor-in-chief of Riyadh-based *Arab News*, one of the leading English-language newspapers in the Arab world.

With Radio Baladi's initial success, Hanania and Alhusinni are looking to expand the show into other markets. One possibility is to take Radio Baladi's simultaneous broadcast to the nation's capital region.

"By moving to Washington, D.C., we will expand the participation of our audience with issues important to us," Alhusinni said. "And this is not just for us, the Muslim-American community or the Arab-American community, but for everyone who is listening."

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